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Boston University

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BETA-BLOCKER STUDY HALTED; BUMC ONE OF 32 STUDY SITES

A major clinical study of coronary heart disease conducted by the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute at the Medical Center and 30 other clinical trial sites across the nation and one in Canada has been halted earlier than planned because of dramatically positive results.

The NHLBI took this unusual step because data from the Beta-Blocker Heart Attack Trial showed that a group of post-heart attack patients receiving the drug propranolol over a 24-month period had a 26-percent lower total mortality rate than patients in a control group who received a placebo.

Propranolol, also known as Inderal, is a drug commonly used in clinical practice for the treatment of recurrent chest pain (angina pectoris), hypertension and cardiac rhythm irregularities. This drug, therefore, is readily available for immediate use by heart attack patients.

"The 26-percent reduction in total mortality rate observed in the group treated with propranolol following an acute heart attack corresponds to a very high level of statistical significance, thereby strengthening the conclusion that the drug exerts a beneficial effect on those who have had heart attacks," said Pantel S. Vokonas, M.D., an associate professor of medicine at BUSM and principal investigator of the study at the Medical Center.

The national study, which involved 3,837 patients, was begun in 1978 and was scheduled to end in the spring of 1982. Formal announcement of the decision to call off the study was made by the NHLBI Oct. 29 in Bethesda, Md.

The results of the BHAT study strengthen and extend conclusions of previous studies of beta-blockers in survivors of acute myocardial infarction, and indicate that the beneficial effects of propranolol appear to occur primarily in the first year following myocardial infarction.

"These studies clearly have implications of great clinical importance in the future management of individuals with MI as well as other forms of coronary heart disease. The overall magnitude of this potential benefit, however, cannot be determined by this study alone, since many patients already receiving propranolol for complications of their heart attacks, such as unstable chest pain, were excluded from consideration in the study," Vokonas explained.

The BUMC clinical trial was the fifth largest national site. It involved 141 heart attack patients, ages 30 to 69, at six Boston area hospitals:

Boston City Hospital, University Hospital, Malden Hospital, Carney Hospital, Whidden Memorial Hospital and St. Elizabeth's Hospital. Lorraine M. Kilcoyne, R.N., was clinical coordinator of the BUMC study.

The national BHAT study began in June 1978. A total of 3,837 men and women with documented myocardial infarction were enrolled and randomized into one of two study groups: 1,916 were given propranolol and 1,921 were given the placebo. The two groups of patients were closely matched with regard to demographic factors, known cardiac risk factors, medical history, use of medications, physical findings and laboratory data. Patients in the "high risk" category, such as those with congestive heart failure or those who required beta-blocker therapy, were excluded from the study. (The term "beta-blocker" refers to a drug that blocks nerve endings called beta receptors that regulate the strength and frequency of muscle contractions in the heart.)

As of October, the data showed a mortality rate of 9.5 percent in the placebo group (183 deaths) and 7.0 percent in the propranolol group (135 deaths), a reduction of 26 percent. Patients in the propranolol group also did not have significantly increased frequency of congestive heart failure. Such side effects as low blood pressure, tiredness, depression, impotence and gastrointestinal problems, however, were more common in patients who received propranolol.

The Veteran's Administration Medical Center in West Roxbury, Mass., was another test site in the study. Kevin M. McIntyre, M.D., and William E. Strauss, M.D., co-investigators, directed that trial, which enrolled 110 patients from six New England area VA hospitals. Patricia Woods, R.N., was the clinical coordinator at the West Roxbury trial site.

LCME AWARDS SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
EIGHT-YEAR RE-ACCREDITATION

The Liaison Committee on Medical Education, an accrediting body of the American Medical Association and the Association of American Medical Colleges, has voted to re-accredit the School of Medicine for eight years, according to University President John R. Silber, Ph.D., and Dean Sandson.

The Committee voted to confer continuing full accreditation on the School at its Oct. 14 meeting. The next review of the BUSM medical education program leading to the M.D. degree, therefore, will be during the 1988-89 academic year.

Accreditation is awarded to the School on the basis of judgment that there is an appropriate balance between the size of enrollment in each class and the total resources of the institution, including the faculty, physical facilities and the operating budget. The School was last accredited in 1973.

In preparation for re-accreditation, the School of Medicine conducted an intensive self-evaluation that began in early 1979. Numerous committees at the School examined such varied matters as BUSM's administrative structure, curriculum evaluation procedures and student financial aid. A report on the committees' findings was submitted to the LCME last October.

The LCME conducted a four-day site visit at the School last December.

O'CONNOR AND BROITMAN RECEIVE
OFFICE OF ADMISSIONS POSTS

John F. O'Connor, M.D., a professor of radiology, and Selwyn A. Broitman, Ph.D., a professor of microbiology, were appointed associate and assistant deans of admissions at BUSM, respectively, by the University's Board of Trustees at its Oct. 29 meeting.

O'Connor, who has been assistant dean of admissions at the School since 1975, has been acting associate dean since the sudden death last March of Jacob Swartz, M.D.

A 1957 graduate of the School of Medicine, O'Connor joined the BUSM faculty in 1965. In addition to his faculty position in the Department of Radiology, he is a professor of pediatrics and anatomy. He also is director of pediatric radiology at Boston City Hospital and is chief radiologist at Kennedy Memorial Hospital in Brighton, Mass.

Broitman, who has been a member of the BUSM faculty since 1969, also is an associate professor of nutritional sciences at the Goldman School of Graduate Dentistry. He is a member of the Special Scientific Staff (pathology) at Boston City Hospital, and is a research associate at the Mallory Institute of Pathology's Nutrition-Pathology Unit. He has received several honors, including the School of Medicine's 1976 Teaching Award.

RICHARD WURTMAN IS SECOND
BUSM STERLING DRUG PROFESSOR

Richard J. Wurtman, M.D., a professor of neuroendocrine regulation at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, is the School of Medicine's second Sterling Drug Visiting Professor. His keynote address, to be presented Thursday, Dec. 3, at 4 p.m. in Keefer Auditorium, is entitled "The Clinical Pharmacology of Nutrients Affecting Neurotransmission." The lecture is open to all members of the Medical Center community. Wurtman, who will be at the School from Nov. 30 to Dec. 5, also will meet with members of the Cardiovascular Institute and members of the Departments of Neurology, Pharmacology, and Biochemistry.

The annual visiting professorship was established in July 1979 when the School became the first medical school in the country to receive a \$50,000 endowment from Sterling Drug, Inc., of New York City.

ACKER, EDELIN TO TAKE PART IN
OB-GYN CME COURSE IN DECEMBER

David Acker, M.D., an associate professor of obstetrics and gynecology, is course director of "Clinical Obstetrics and Gynecology," a continuing medical education course offered Dec. 27 to 31 at the Orlando Hyatt Hotel in Orlando, Fla.

Acker and Kenneth C. Edelin, M.D., chairman of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, will each moderate two sets of discussions in addition to discussing such topics as pelvic inflammatory disease, adolescent pregnancy and fetal rights, and chronic hypertension in pregnancy.

Other participants will include faculty members from Harvard Medical School, Tufts University School of Medicine and the University of Utah College of Medicine. For further information, contact the BUSM Department of Continuing Medical Education at x5602 (247-5602).

BRIEFLY NOTED

Paul H. Black, M.D., director of the Humphrey Cancer Research Center, and Donald M. Small, M.D., director of the School's Biophysics Institute, were cited in the Oct. 12 issue of Current Contents, published by the Institute for Scientific Information. The publication lists physicians who have been quoted in articles at least 1,000 times in one year....Leonard S. Gottlieb, M.D., chairman of the Department of Pathology and director of the Mallory Institute of Pathology, recently was appointed American editor of the Biopsy Pathology Series, published by Chapman and Hall in Great Britain....Jose Lopez, M.D., an assistant professor of medicine, was a featured speaker at the International Symposium on Ovarian Cancer, recently held in Palma de Mallorca, Spain....Albert Gaw, M.D., an assistant professor of psychiatry and a staff psychiatrist at the Edith Nourse Rogers Memorial Veterans Administration Medical Center, recently was named president-elect of the caucus of the Asian-American Psychiatrists of the American Psychiatric Association for 1982-83....Donald R. Giller, director of marketing and public affairs at BUMC, recently was awarded the Evans Houghton Memorial Award by the New England Hospital Public Relations Association in recognition of his contributions to the field of hospital public relations.

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